

FIGHTING RALLY FOILS WANDERERS

By 'NOVA'

Wycombe Wanderers 2, Spennymoor United 2

FOR the first 42 minutes of their Amateur Cup third round clash with Spennymoor on Saturday there seemed little doubt that confident Wycombe Wanderers, moving sweetly over the clinging Loakes Park mud and with two goals already to their credit, would move easily into the quarter-final.

But in a dramatic second half, the crowd of nearly 7,000 saw the tables turned to such a degree that it was Wycombe at the end who were fighting desperately to survive!

Few matches can have changed pattern so much in mid-stream as this. How could the dominant Wycombe of the first half turn into such a bumbling, shaky, and disjointed combination in the second? And how could the nervous and dispirited "Moors" transform themselves into the fighting team of the second amazing period?

GIFT GOAL

Perhaps the unexpected gift of a goal two minutes before half-time or an interval pep talk from coach Harry Bell inspired the visitors. Or perhaps the thick mud sapped the Wanderers' strength more than the hardy visitors, reputed to be the fittest team in the Northern League.

The real answer, I think, lies in the fact that the Wanderers failed to deliver an early knock-out punch when they had their opponents groggy and at their mercy.

The early goals, a penalty from Roystone and a beautiful header by Lowen, only gave Wycombe a false sense of security, and in the second period the Northerners showed that this lead was easily within their reach. In fact only luck and plucky goalkeeping by Bunting stopped the "Moors" from going through without a replay.

And a big factor in the Wanderers' decline was that the two wing men, Hodges and Worley, were easily contained. With the wingers unable to use anything but the short pass, the Wanderers' defenders should have pushed long passes down the middle for Lowen, easily the best forward, and Horseman to exploit.

TWO UP!

In one direct effort, and their first after ten minutes play, Spennymoor almost achieved more than Wycombe had in all their short-passing intricate movements. The ball rippled up-field to McGregor, whose shot was just saved by Bunting at the foot of the post.

The fight was really on now, with few people giving Wycombe, their defence providing no cover to each other, much of a chance. But the "Moors", like Wycombe in the first half, seemed reluctant to take their chances.

Beck stopped a shot on the line with his goalkeeper scrambling back, and a few minutes later Fawell nipped in and got the ball as Bunting tried to bounce it, only to hit his shot straight at Roystone on the line!

Somehow the courageous Bunting pulled out just a little extra to baulk the visitors—at least for another week.

Wycombe appeared to get the message five minutes later when Hodges' first-time cross was superbly headed goalwards by Lowen. Only a despairing hand flick by full-back Berryman stopped the ball entering the net. But 30 seconds later Roystone hammered the penalty kick home and Wycombe were in front.

Then for the only period of the game did the Wanderers appear to want to go hard and fast for goal. Lewis, who started well, hit a great first-time shot which Ellen just knocked over the bar, and Lowen was not far off the mark with a snap shot. Then Balson, for once in the right place, broke through strongly but was just robbed by the goalkeeper. The ball went straight to Worley, whose centre was beautifully headed into the net by Lowen.

BUT NO GOAL SPREE

This, we thought, was to be the start of a goal-rush. But the expected treat never came, despite the territorial advantage created by the half-back line and the skilful Pullin and Beck.

Spennymoor struck back just before half-time, when Morris, usually well guarded by Pullin, chased a long pass to the edge of the penalty area. Balson careered back to cover and crash-tackled the winger. Skipper Icton took the free-kick but his shot cracked against a post and rebounded to the feet of West, whose shot surprisingly eluded the groping, despairing hand of Bunting.

This was the turning point of the game for immediately after the restart Spennymoor moved to the attack—and rarely left the Wycombe half.

After Brown had missed an open goal Bunting flung himself sideways to save from Banks, and then saved another point-blank drive from the same player. But eight minutes after the interval Spennymoor drew level when a dropping free-kick was headed into goal by Fawell, who kept up his record of scoring in every round of this season.